

TENNESSEE FOLKLORE SOCIETY

BULLETIN

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Nashville, Tennessee

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## RIDDLES FROM WEST TENNESSEE

by

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As far as I know, no extensive group of "true riddles" has hitherto been published from either East or West Tennessee. Middle Tennessee riddles have been reported in two excellent general collections. The first, by T. J. Farr, "Riddles of Middle Tennessee," appeared in this Bulletin, Vol. I, No. 3 (October, 1935), 28-40, and was reprinted in Professor Farr's article, "Riddles and Superstitions of Middle Tennessee," Journal of American Folklore, XLVIII (1935), 318-326. The second was by W. A. Redfield, "A Collection of Middle Tennessee Riddles," in Southern Folklore Quarterly, I, No. 3 (September, 1937), 35-50.

The West Tennessee riddles given here are fewer in number than those in either of the Middle Tennessee collections. There are two reasons for this. The riddles were reported by students in my folklore classes as part of their term collections contributed to the Folklore Archive at Murray State College. Since I had made no special effort to stress the riddle in my classes, only an occasional student has been interested. Of the 73 items given here, the majority were contributed by two students from Henry County, Mr. Ewing Jackson and Mr. Horace Derrington. Mr. Jackson recalled twenty-nine riddles from his childhood, and collected fourteen more from a Negro informant. The significance of his contribution to this collection is understood when it is seen that I have given independent numbers to only sixty of the seventy-three items. Four other variants are also given in full; the remainder are merely noted with an indication of their variations, source and contributors.

The second reason for the comparatively small number of items in this collection is that it has been limited to what Professor Archer Taylor calls "true riddles." There are a number of other kinds of riddling questions in the Tennessee collections of the Folklore Archive at Murray. At some later date, after they have been annotated, I hope to present them in this Bulletin.

Professor Taylor's exhaustive collection, English Riddles from Oral Tradition (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951), lists under eleven large categories 1749 distinct items as the corpus of "true riddles" in English. Some of these numbers have single illustrations; other are reported from a dozen or more English and American collections. These West Tennessee riddles have been grouped under the Taylor headings for ready reference. I have listed all eleven of the Taylor categories, though we have no examples for three of them.

If one of these riddles is also found in the same form in the Taylor volume, my reference reads: "Taylor No." followed by the number assigned to the riddle in that book. If the Tennessee version has some variation, the reference is "Compare Taylor No. (etc.)." I have usually noted what the variation is. Where the riddle apparently belongs in a certain category, but differs from the texts in Taylor, my note reads "Compare Taylor Nos." followed by two numbers, usually joined by a hyphen. For six items (my numbers 6, 13, 41, 46, 53 and 55) on which I queried Professor Taylor by mail, he was kind enough to comment on, or approve, my classification.

Both as a folklore collector, and as a teacher interested in stimulating others to collect, I am impressed by one surprising fact. Even a collection as small as this has produced several texts which Professor Taylor says are new to him. In addition, as my notes show, there are interesting variations from the Taylor texts both in the riddle questions and the answers given. See, for example, numbers 11, 29, 36C, 39, 40, 54 and 57. The answer to No. 54 seems to be first English version of a particular European riddling theme.

I stress these items in order to urge folklorists interested in collecting riddles not to become discouraged by the exhaustive nature of Professor Taylor's book. Taylor's figure, 1749, should not be allowed to become canonical for the English riddle as Child's figure, 305, too nearly has for the English ballad. Professor Taylor's own notes, with their stress on themes not reported hitherto in English riddling, should be a challenge to the collector.

The Tennessee collector has, I believe, two particular opportunities for important work. It is startling that no Tennessee folklorist, as far as I know, has harvested the rich field of Negro riddling. Among rural Negroes in most of the United States, riddling was, and probably still is, extremely popular. Tennessee should prove no exception. The other project would be to secure information from riddlers on the function of riddles. Who tells riddles? How are they learned? When are they asked? Are they used as a complete entertainment or along with other activities? Does the riddler like certain kinds of riddles and not others? Under what circumstances are riddles such as No. 60 asked? Has the riddler lost interest in some riddles, but become fonder of others which he originally did not find interesting? Though we can guess some of the answers from our own experience, I think the question of why riddling is or has been popular is in itself a riddle that needs to be proposed and solved.

Here is a tabulation of contributors.

<u>Abbreviation</u>	<u>Contributor</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>No. of Items</u>
DC	Doris Castellaw	Crockett	5
HD	Horace Darrington	Henry	12
EJ	Ewing Jackson	Henry	43
TRJ	T. R. Jones	Stewart	2
CK	Clarence Kennedy	Henry	1
SL	Sara Leonard	Weakley	1
MCL	Mary C. Long	Marshall	3
MR	Marie Rowlette	Stewart	1

<u>Abbreviation</u>	<u>Contributor</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>No. of Items</u>
CSS	Charles S. Speed	Maury	1
NJT (HLS)	Nancy Jane Terry (Harris Lee Stubble- field, EJ's Negro informant)	Shelby (Memphis)	4

Only a few of my student collectors gave any notes with their riddles, apart from data on source. (See Nos. 3 and 23.) Mr. Ewing Jackson wrote: "These riddles I remember hearing in Henry County, Tennessee, about 1936 to 1940, when I used to go to those little high school parties. We didn't have all that 'new-fangle-dangle paraphernalia' to provide entertainment that they have in a lot of sections. Riddles were a part of the entertainment at a party. Everybody would be seated. Someone would say a riddle. The one who guessed the answer got to tell one. If you were wise and 'up' on your riddles, you could be the star of the show."

"As for Negro riddles, I went to the homes of Negroes and asked them to tell me riddles and they did. They told me they tell them to the kids, and they use them when a large number of people gather at one place for entertainment."

I. Comparisons to a Living Creature, Nos. 1-335

1. It goes east and west;  
It goes north and south;  
Has ten thousand teeth  
And no mouth.

--"Cards you card 'bats' with"  
(i.e. cotton cards).

(EJ from memory)

Taylor No. 20

2. What stands on one foot, has its heart in its head, and grows in mother's garden?

--A cabbage.

(EJ from memory)

Compare Taylor No. 32

3. Blacky under blacky,  
Blacky over blacky;  
Three legs up,  
Two legs down.  
What is it?

--A Negro carrying a wash pot on  
his head. ("This riddle is not  
very good; I always thought they  
were supposed to rime. I've known  
it for a long time.")

(HD from A. B. Jeffrey)

Compare Taylor No. 64. For the answer compare No. 67.



4. Three legs up,  
Six legs down;  
White in the middle,  
And black all around.

--Man riding horse with a wash pot  
on his head.

(EJ from memory)

Compare Taylor Nos. 64-66

5. Four legs up,  
Four legs down;  
Soft in the middle,  
Hard all around.

--A bed.

(EJ from memory)

Variant inserts "and" after lines 1 and 3  
Taylor No. 69

(HD from Hattie Davis,  
aged 72)

6. Goes to the spring once a week, and leaves the bed at home.

--Bed clothes. (Collector's note:  
"Everybody usually washes by a  
spring in Delno Community.")

(EJ from HLS, Negro)

Compare Taylor Nos. 112-222. Professor Taylor writes that the text  
is new to him.

7. Up hill  
And down hill,  
It goes to mill,  
And stands still.

--Road.

(EJ from memory)

Compare Taylor No. 124. Here the reversal of lines 3 and 4 makes the  
comparison to an animal more precise and less paradoxical.

8. What goes up the chimney, but won't go down the chimney?

--Smoke.

(Marshall Co., MCL from  
Mrs. R. L. Long)

Compare Taylor No. 141, except for "the chimney." Possibly some con-  
fusion has entered from the "umbrella" riddle, Taylor No. 1604.

9. Over the water,  
Under the water;  
Ten against two.

--"Woman walking across bridge with  
a jug of water on her head." (Col-  
lector said informant didn't know  
what "two" was.) (EJ from HLS, Negro)

Compare Taylor No. 165. The "ten" must mean the fingers, but the  
"two" baffles me. Her ears, the ears of the jug, or simply the two  
sides of the jug, are all possibilities.

10. What goes up stairs on its head?

--Tack in a shoe. (EJ from memory)

Taylor No. 188

11. Give it hay, it'll live;  
Give it water, it'll die.

--Fire. (EJ from memory)

Compare Taylor No. 235. "Food," not "hay," is given for line 1 in  
Taylor.

12. What has eyes and cannot see?

--Potato. (Marshall Co., MCL from  
Mrs. R. L. Long)

Taylor No. 277

13. Long tongue,  
Hollow head,  
Lot of fuss  
And nothing said.

--Dinner bell. (EJ from memory)

Compare Taylor Nos. 292-296, "tongue." Professor Taylor writes that the  
text is new to him.

14. What has four legs, a long tongue, goes to water but never drinks?

--Wagon. (HD from Dan Smith)

Taylor No. 293

15. What has eyes and can't see,  
A tongue and can't talk,  
Has no legs but it can walk?

--A shoe. (EJ from HLS, Negro)

Compare Taylor Nos. 296 and 311.

16. What is it that has a tongue and can't talk,  
Can run but can't walk?

--A wagon.

(Stewart Co., TRJ from  
J. L. Hicks)

Taylor No. 316

17. Eyes and can't see;  
Legs and can't walk;  
Pipe in its mouth;  
It can't talk.

--Stove.

(EJ from HLS, Negro)

Compare Taylor Nos. 319 and 320.

18. What has four eyes (i's) and can't see?

--Mississippi.

(EJ from memory)

Taylor No. 328

## II. Comparisons to an Animal, Nos. 336-458

19. Tippy up stairs;  
Tippy down stairs;  
If you don't mind,  
Tippy will bite you.

--"Wasper" (wasp).

(EJ from HLS, Negro)

Taylor No. 338

20. Hippy Tippy up stairs,  
Hippy Tippy down stairs;  
If you don't watch out,  
Hippy Tippy will bite you.

--A wasp.

(Maury Co., CSS from his  
grandmother)

Taylor No. 338

21. What goes over the hills in the daytime, and sets in the pail at night?

--Milk. (It's in the cow's bag in the  
daytime; goes over pasture. You milk  
it out, and it's in the pail at night.) (EJ from memory)

Compare Taylor Nos. 449-452.

22. What is it that travels all over the hills and valleys in the daytime and stands on its head at night?

--Tack in a shoe heel.

(Stewart Co., TRJ from  
J. L. Hicks)

Taylor No. 457

III. Comparisons to Several Animals, Nos. 459-512

No Tennessee variants in the Folklore Archive at Murray State College.

IV. Comparisons to a Person, Nos. 513-826

23. Little white nettie coat,  
In a white petticoat,  
She has a little red nose;  
The longer she stands, the shorter she grows.

--Candle.

(HD from Hattie Davis,  
aged 72)

("I don't think that is the way it goes but it has been so long since I heard it that I'm not sure. We used to tell it when I was a little girl about 60 years ago.")

Compare Taylor Nos. 607-610.

24. Little Nancy Edicoat  
In a white petticoat;  
The longer she stands  
The shorter she grows.

--Candle.

(EJ from memory)

Taylor No. 611

25. I go all over the house in the day and sit in the corner at night.  
What am I?

--Broom.

(HD from Hattie Davis,  
aged 72)

Taylor No. 695

26. Up she jumps,  
Out she runs;  
Now she squats  
And out it comes.

--A woman milking a cow.

(EJ from memory)

Taylor No. 734

27. Long, tall, slim fellow;  
Pull his tongue and make him bellow.  
What is it?

--A shotgun.

(Crockett Co., DC from a  
60 year old neighbor)

Taylor No. 755



28. As I went over London Bridge,  
I met my brother Bill.  
I cut off his head,  
And sucked his blood,  
And left his body standing still.

--Jug of whiskey.

(Memphis, NJT from her  
mother who learned it in  
Missouri)

Compare Taylor No. 805.

29. As I went over London Bridge,  
I met dear old Nancy;  
I pulled her neck and sucked her blood,  
And left her body dancing.

--Jug of whiskey. ("Drank contents of (EJ from memory)  
jug; threw it in river. When it hit  
the waves, it danced.")

Compare Taylor No. 805, but the body "dancing" rather than standing  
is connected with No. 806.

V. Comparisons to Several Persons, Nos. 827-1035

30. Whitey went in Whitey;  
Whitey run Whitey out of Whitey.

--White dog run a white dog out  
of a cotton patch.

(EJ from memory)

Compare Taylor Nos. 842-844.

31. Whitey went in Whitey;  
Whitey came out of Whitey,  
And left Whitey in Whitey.

--White hen went into cotton patch,  
laid a white egg, and came out.

(EJ from memory)

Compare Taylor Nos. 860-861, but this text is closer to the cotton  
field series.

32. As I went over London Bridge,  
I met a heap of people;  
Some were nicky,  
Some were nacky,  
Some the color of brown tobaccy.

--Bees.

(Memphis, NJT from her  
mother who learned it in  
Missouri)

Compare Taylor No. 898. For the answer  
compare Nos. 899-902.

33. As I went over London Bridge,  
I met a heap of people;  
Some were nick,  
An' some were nack,  
Some were color of brown tobacco.

--"Waspers" (wasps).

(EJ from HLS, Negro)

Compare Taylor No. 898a (quail); for answer, compare No. 901 (wasps).

34. Down in the meadow there is a green house;  
In the green house there is a white house;  
In the white house there is a red house;  
In the red house there lived a bunch of little Negroes.

--Watermelon.

(EJ from memory)

Taylor No. 916

VI. Comparisons to Plants, Nos. 1036-1099

No Tennessee variants in the Folklore Archive at Murray State College.

VII. Comparisons to Things, Nos. 1100-1259

No Tennessee variants in the Folklore Archive at Murray State College.

VIII. Enumeration of Comparisons, Nos. 1260-1408

35. As high as a house,  
Then as low as a mouse;  
As bitter as gall,  
But sweet after all.

--A walnut. (The walnut was first  
high on a tree, then low when it  
falls to the ground. The shell is  
bitter, but the nut is sweet.)

(Crockett Co., DC from a  
60 year old neighbor)

Variant omits "Then as" in line 2, and  
the first "As" in line 3.

(Henry Co., CK from a  
lady about 45 years old)

Compare Taylor Nos. 1270-1272.

- 36A. Crooked as a rainbow,  
Teeth like a cat.  
Guess all your lifetime,  
And you can't guess that.

--A briar bush.

(Crockett Co., DC from a  
60 year old neighbor)

- 36B. Crooked as a rainbow, teeth like a cat,  
Guess all your life and you can't guess that.

--Briar.

Taylor No. 1295

(HD from Hattie Davis,  
aged 72)

- 36C. Cracked (crooked) as a rainbow,  
And claws like a cat;  
Guess all your lifetime,  
You can't guess that.

--Briar.

(EJ from HLS, Negro)

Compare Taylor No. 1295. No variant with "claws" is listed.

37. Round as a biscuit,  
Busy as a bee;  
Pretties little thing,  
You ever did see.

--A watch.

(EJ from memory)

Variants: Line 3: "The prettiest"

(Memphis, NJT from her mother)

Line 4: "I" for "you"

(Henry Co., HD who says it is very common)

Taylor No. 1310.

38. Round as a biscuit, deep as a cup,  
All of the king's horses can't pull it up.

--Well.

(HD from Minnie Smith, aged 76)

Taylor No. 1318

39. Round as a biscuit, deep as a cup,  
The whole Mississippi River can't fill it up.

--Well.

(Memphis, NJT from her mother who learned it in Missouri)

Compare Taylor No. 1319 where the answer is a "sieve."

40. Round as a biscuit,  
Steep as a cup;  
Mississippi River  
Can't fill it up.

--A strainer.

(EJ from memory)

Compare Taylor No. 1319, but for answer compare No. 1321.

41. Round as a biscuit,  
Bitter as a gall;  
In the middle  
The best of all.

--A walnut.

(EJ from memory)

I do not find this in Taylor, but compare other walnut riddles, e.g. No. 1346, "round and rough," and No. 1270, "bitter and sweet."

Professor Taylor in a letter, says he is "inclined to believe (this riddle) is compositum mixtum of themes belonging to other riddles." He suggests "round as a biscuit" is borrowed from the watch riddle, and that "in the middle the best of all" also belongs to an eye riddle.

42. Round as a biscuit,  
Slick as a mole,  
Great big tail  
With a thumbin' hole\*?

--Frying pan. (\*"That's what we call (EJ from memory)  
the hole where you hang the pan up  
on a nail.")

Compare Taylor No. 1349.

43. Soft as silk,  
White as milk;  
Green coat and thick wall  
Covers me all.

--Walnut

(EJ from HLS, Negro)

Compare Taylor No. 1359. This riddle lacks the usual phrase, "bitter as gall."

44. White as snow and not snow;  
Green as grass and not grass;  
Red as blood and not blood;  
Black as tar and not tar.

--Blackberry in process of growth.  
("Bloom; green berry; then after it  
turns red; then it turns ripe.")

(EJ from HLS, Negro)

Taylor No. 1391

45. Opens like a barn door,  
Shuts up like a bat.  
Guess all your lifetime,  
You can't guess that.

--Umbrella.

(EJ from HLS, Negro)

Taylor No. 1401

IX. Enumerations in Terms of Form or of Form and  
Function, Nos. 1409-1495

46. Under your apron  
Black as a crow,  
Hair all around  
Thick as will grow;



If you will touch it,  
It will do no harm;  
Stick something in  
Long as your arm.

--"Muffler" (i.e. woman's muff). (EJ from memory)

Compare Taylor No. 1428, though the action suggests it belongs with  
Nos. 1739-1749.

47. What is:  
Big at both ends,  
Little in the middle,  
Digs up dirt,  
And sings like a fiddle?

--"A dirt-dauber" (an insect). (EJ from HLS, Negro)

Taylor No. 1431

48. Dead in the middle  
and live at each end.

--Man plowing with horses. (EJ from memory)

49. Big at the bottom,  
Little at the top.  
Right in the middle,  
A thing goes flippity flop.

--Churn (Crockett Co., DC from a  
to year old neighbor)

Variants of lines 3 and 4:

Something in the middle  
Goes flippity flop.

(EJ from memory)

Thing in the middle  
Goes flippity flop.

(Weakley Co., SL from his  
mother)

A thing in the middle  
Goes flippity flop.

(HD from his mother)

Taylor No. 1445

50. Two lookers,  
Two crookers,  
One switcher,  
Four hangdowns.

--Cow.

(HD from A. B. Jeffrey)

Taylor No. 1476

51. Two lookers,  
Two hookers,  
Four downhangers,  
One switchabout.

--A cow.

(EJ from HLS, Negro)

Taylor No. 1476

X. Enumeration in Terms of Color, Nos. 1496-1572

52. What is black and white and read all over?

--Newspaper.

(EJ from memory; also HD from memory)

Taylor No. 1498

53. Black without and white within,  
Raise your leg and poke it in.

--A boot.

(EJ from memory)

Compare Taylor No. 1538, though the color is usually "red within." Later boots (as I recall from childhood) had a white lining. Professor Taylor writes the original form of the riddle properly belongs in Nos. 1739-1749, and that the variant "white" shows the speaker is now aware of what is intended.

54. What is first white; then green; then brown?

--Chestnut.

(HD from Minnie Smith, aged 76)

Compare Taylor No. 1561. Although the arrangement of colors in chronological sequence "ordinarily refers to the blackberry," Professor Taylor points out (p. 635) "the Rumanians and modern Greeks use it for a nut."

55. It's red, it's blue,  
It's tassel, it's green;  
The king can't touch it,  
No more than the queen.

--(No answer recalled)

(EJ from memory)

Compare Taylor No. 1570. I have tentatively classified this with the "rainbow" riddle. The informant did not suggest a meaning for "tassel." Professor Taylor writes: "I have no idea of what 'tassel' might be and I hope that you may recover more versions and establish its meaning. I should expect it to be a color."

XI. Enumerations in Terms of Acts, Nos. 1573-1749

- 56A. House full and yard full,  
Can't catch a spoonful.

--Smoke.

(Setwart Co., MR from her  
mother)

Variant omits "and" in line 1

(Marshall Co., MCL from  
Mrs. R. L. Long)

Taylor No. 1643

- 56B. House full, yard full,  
You can't catch a tablespoonful.

--Smoke.

(EJ from memory)

Compare Taylor No. 1643 and No. 1649a.

- 56C. Yard full, house full,  
Can't catch a thimbleful.

--Smoke.

(Crockett Co., DC from 60  
year old neighbor)

Compare Taylor No. 1643

57. What is it that can be broken by a whisper?

--A secret.

(EJ from memory)

Compare Taylor Nos. 1668-1669. These versions give "silence" as the  
answer.

58. What do you cut at both ends to make it longer?

--Ditch.

(EJ from HLS, Negro)

Taylor No. 1693

59. Riddle me, riddle me, rocket.  
What a poor man throws away  
A rich man totes in his pocket.

--Snot.

(EJ from HLS, Negro)

Taylor No. 1724

60. Old man went to bed and forgot it,  
Old lady went to bed and forgot it,  
The old man turned over and stuck it in.

--Door key. ("They think everything  
but that.")

(EJ from memory)

Taylor No. 1744

## AMERICAN FOLK INSTRUMENTS

### II. THE HAMMERED DULCIMER\*

by

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Several years ago radio audiences throughout the nation were fascinated by a quaint musical sound which they heard in the Ford Early American Dance Program. Everyone could identify the fiddle and the string bass in the group playing, but the peculiar accompanying instrument which sounded unlike anything known in contemporary life was the captivation which held many a non-dancer, as well as the dancers, to the program. A few old-timers remembered the sound from long ago, while everyone else who tuned in the program made his own guess as to what it was. Unfortunately the program ran its cycle and passed from the American scene, never to return it seems. Only the memory of that strange plunking sound remains, and no acquaintance of the public as to what made it has come about.

The source of this strange sound was the hammered dulcimer, a complicated and completely original instrument. It may be considered a folk instrument, because it never was awarded the dignity of having compositions written for it, nor was it given a place in the concert hall. Although one of the most complex of folk instruments, it still lends itself to informal music and awaits the touch of anyone with a lilting tune in his heart. One look at this box, covered with many strings, is enough to amaze the lover of folk arts. Here is a physics laboratory in one neat package. Most of the instruments which can be found today were made in humble homes or shops where tools were few but ingenuity great.

The student of instruments must admit to a much clearer history of development in the case of the hammered dulcimer as compared to that of the Appalachian Mountain dulcimer. With the latter instrument, the threads of chronology are spider webs and as yet not able to support the weight of historical requirements. We only guess that the plucked instrument was used in Elizabethan times. On the other hand, the hammered dulcimer has a clear history and much documentation in all languages. So far, its earliest convincing proof is from a bas-relief on a cathedral porch in Spain of about 1184. It can be traced to all the continents and to most countries. In China, where it first was found about 1800, it was called the yang ch'in (foreign zither). Many writers have called it the forerunner of the piano; and indeed it could have well inspired inventors to mechanize this complicated box.

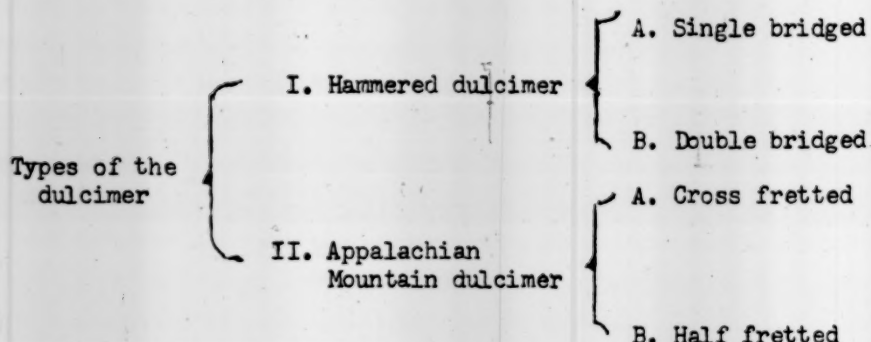
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In my earlier article, "American Folk Instruments: The Appalachian Mountain

\*Editor's Note: This is the second in a series of articles on musical instruments produced and used by the folk. The first, "The Appalachian Mountain Dulcimer," appeared in the March, 1952 (Vol. XVII, No. 1) issue. Subsequent discussions will deal with improvised instruments, such as jewsharp, banjo, mandolin, et cetera.



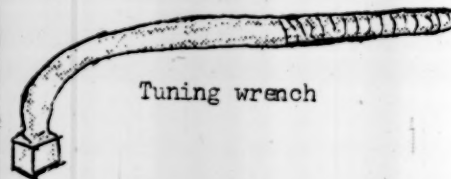
Dulcimer" (March, 1952), a chart illustrating the types of dulcimers was given. This chart may now be expanded to cover the hammered dulcimer.



As in the case of the Appalachian Mountain dulcimer, the hammered dulcimer is classified by its string arrangement. The single-bridged dulcimer is a simple instrument in which the strings are passed over a bridge, after having been fastened to one end of the box and to tuning pins on the other end. The instrument-maker places a single bridge, or a series of bridges like chessmen, in such a way as to permit playing on either side of the bridge. The player strikes the strings with hammers, and the sound is amplified by the sound box over which the strings are fastened. The single-bridged instrument is comparatively easy to make, for all the ingenious music-lover has to do is to prepare a strong elongated box, fasten strings to one end by screws, and, after running them over one bridge, connect them to pins embedded in the other end of the box. The pins were hammered out on anvils and designed to be forced tightly into prepared holes in the hard wood.



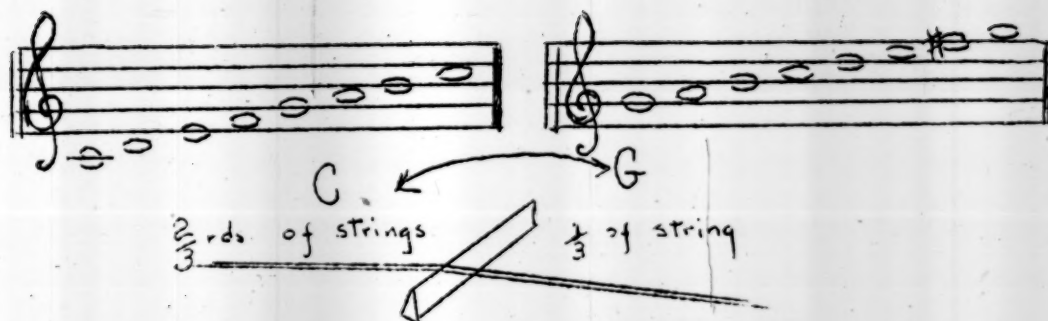
Tuning pin



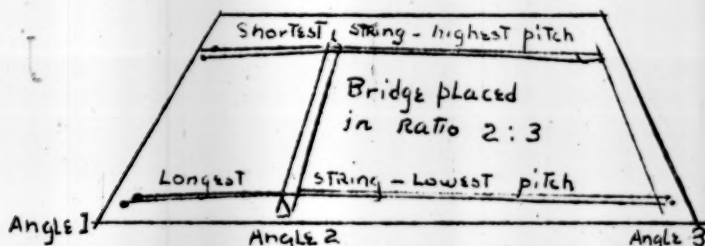
Tuning wrench

Tuning wrenches were anvil products and were necessary to turn the pins because of the vise-like grip of the wood and the tension of the strings.

In this single-bridged instrument the diatonic scale is tuned and the bridge so arranged as to give two scales, one a perfect fifth above the other. The calculation for this double scale was not too difficult to make, for the old-timer simply measured one-third of the string and placed the bridge there, not realizing that milleniums ago the Greeks had first found such calculations of dividing a string and that the monochord of Sixth Century Boethius had set up lore for such tuning. Thus the player had at his command two sets of notes.



With the bridge properly placed, the player has only to tune the strings to pitch on one side of the bridge. On the other side the strings automatically give the fifth notes above. The seeming simplicity of this tuning, however, is a misleading one. Hammered dulcimer makers, as all workers with strings, soon discovered that in order to achieve the high pitches the strings must be shorter. The many different lengths of strings make necessary a slanting bridge--and here is the rub! So minutely must the bridge be placed that one slight deviation can throw the entire set of pitches out of line. The complication can best be given by an illustration.

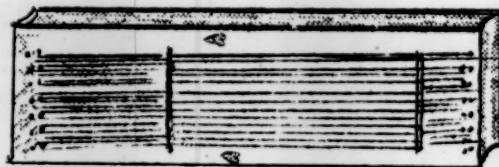


Since there are several angles involved in this placement of the bridge and since hand-made instruments could vary in some one of these angles, placing the bridge by the old-timers was indeed a feat. When all of the angles had been conquered and the instrument tuned, the maker could very well be awarded an advanced degree in plane geometry.

The double-bridged dulcimer is a sort of amalgamation of all of the hammered string instruments found as its progenitors. The single-bridged principles are all carried over, and to these has been added a complication of sympathetic vibration. The chief feature of the instrument then is an arrangement of two bridges to permit the tuning of strings an octave apart. While one set of strings pass over the bridge and through a hole in a second bridge, the other set of strings do just the reverse. With the use of these two bridges the player now has, in addition to the two scales, a new one, an octave below the first scale. By using openings in the bridges the strings are allowed to swing free for the length of the box after passing over one bridge; and, since both bridges have openings, a larger number of strings may be used. As many as thirty-six different pitches can be given from a box only three and a half feet by one and a third feet. When the instrument is in fresh tune, the octave strings swing in sympathetic vibration, and the sound is one unlike any other to be heard.

The shapes of the hammered dulcimers vary widely. True to the nature of folk instruments, the size and shape of the box was determined by the individual maker. If he thought as he looked at the seasoned woods before him, "I want a dulcymore what can be heard all the way to Alpine," he would cut his wood lengths big and strong. If he 'lowed, "Mine's gonta be sweet like the wind rushin' in the pines just before a storm," he would place the strings close together and make the bridge high and narrow. In every case the maker would be his own creator, completely unmindful of the centuries of work in the same realm.

Although there are many shapes, two predominate: (1) the symmetric trapezoid with non-parallel ends; (2) a long rectangular box.



Many times the bridges for these different shaped boxes are ornamented or made in different styles. The holes through which the strings pass in the double-bridged dulcimer may be decorated by drawings. In the case of a single-bridged dulcimer the supports for the bridge may have the appearance of small chessmen.



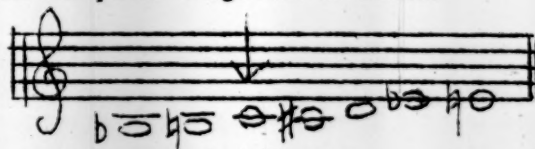
The number of strings used for each pitch varies. In all cases there are at least two strings, usually one string doubled back to make two. In some instruments there are as many as four strings, or two sets of strings for each pitch.

For hammers the maker turned to the cane patch, so useful in pioneer days. To long strips of flexible cane he would fasten a small wooden knob which had been covered with raw hide or felt. Holding one in each hand and with the bounce made possible by the cane, the player could execute several notes per second.

Today the instruments may be found in decreasing quantity. Since their function has been forgotten, they are usually discovered in the attics of Southern homes or perhaps in antique shops where, in many cases, they have not been recognized. The coverall word zither is incorrectly used by the dealer to describe the hammered dulcimer. In some cases they are found in beautiful hardwood cases. Usually the hammers are lost and the strings rusted beyond repair.

By using the old string arrangement as a guide, the instruments may be restrung with piano wire No. 13 which may be secured from any piano store. Strange to say, all strings are of the same wire. The low and high pitches come off surprisingly well if the pitch range is carefully considered. The tuner needs to start with the lowest string in the neighborhood of C, either

middle C or an octave below, depending upon the size of the instrument. By experimentation the pitch range can be found.



It will be in the neighborhood given in the illustration above, as the instruments were usually considered C instruments when made.

As a source of hammers, the corset may replace the cane patch. A small hole bored in one end of the staves permits the attachment of wooded blocks which have been covered with felt.

Too long has the old sound slumbered within the mysterious sound holes of the few boxes scattered over the South. As in the case of the Appalachian Mountain dulcimer, it is my ambition to see this instrument again recognized. Mrs. L. L. McDowell, former president of the Tennessee Folklore Society, and her son, Billy Jack, have done much in acquainting audiences with this forgotten sound. Thanks to the Library of Congress, anyone may hear this unusual and infectious sound by listening to Record AAFS-41B from Album IX of the Library of Congress's monumental contribution to the preservation of our folk music. This one record contains such fine folk tunes as "Devil's Dream," "Nancy's Fancy," "Haste to the Wedding," "Off She Goes," "Irish Washerwoman," and "Pig Town Fling." All are played in true tradition and with a verve that will make the listener rush upstairs to see if one of these strange boxes perchance may still be in the attic.

#### CORRESPONDENCE

The editor of the Bulletin invites letters from readers relating to subjects introduced in this journal--or, indeed on any topics that may be of interest to folklorists.

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Charles F. Bryan, whose second article on musical instruments of the folk appears in these pages, solicits correspondence with anyone who has information about the history or varieties of such instruments. He may be addressed at Peabody College, Nashville, Tennessee

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The Tennessee Folklore Society  
Dear Members:

What happens to folk lore now?

The Tennessee Folklore Society has a history of which it can be proud in collecting and preserving the lore of the people of Tennessee. What do we do now? True there is some more collecting to be done. The field is not exhausted, perhaps never will be, but it is narrowing. That rich store of material preserved in Tennessee because of the lack of communication to the metropolitan culture of the rest of the country has almost disappeared. We have few isolated areas now.



I have grown up with the Tennessee Folklore Society and have attended almost all of its meetings. During these years I have often wondered what was the object of all the collecting. Certainly it has served, and is serving, to provide a good hobby for many people. There is also great worth merely in the preserving of folklore. If recorded it is almost inevitable that the material will be used sometime. Now the consideration arises in this connection as to whether the collector prefers to leave the material to be used as someone else sees fit, or to have some voice in how it is used. Here it appears we have another possible service which the Tennessee Folklore Society could serve. Being already set up it could be used admirably as a disseminating organ for Tennessee folklore and act in the interest of the members as well as the public at large. After all, I'm sure the society doesn't feel that the material should be withheld from public use.

Folklore was once the property of the folk. Simply by virtue of the collecting it cannot now be said to be the individual property of the collector. And yet, how it hurts us all to hear a beautiful folk song misused or to see folk tradition of literary idiom misquoted in such a way as to make fun of a language and culture we love.

The point of all this is, I have a suggestion. I would propose that the Society extend its function and become an active supply source of folk material of this region to those who could use it. Yes, become a publicity agent, a salesman, for Tennessee folklore, if you please.

Of course, such a radical departure would have its critics, and rightly so. The idea is not without flaw. Among the objections which occur to me is that the folklorist might be subjected to hearing modernized versions of his music or parodies of his wit. His consolation might be that with an organization back of him he would be able to voice a loud opinion of such.

Recent national success of a few genuine folk songs leads me to believe that the public is capable of recognizing the true value of the real thing when they have a chance to hear it. We've had so much "brand new," "just-off-the-press," folklore of late I'm sure the public would find a welcome change in some of the genuine articles. I personally feel that there is a great future for the use of folk material in the popular entertainment field and in the inspiration for both musical and literary classics. I believe the time is now right. Is the Society about to miss a great opportunity?

This letter is written mainly in the hope of creating discussion. What are your reactions and ideas?

Respectfully,

W. J. McDowell  
117 Lewis Lane  
Oak Ridge, Tennessee

## THE FOLK MIND IN EARLY SOUTHWESTERN HUMOR

by

James H. Penrod

Kentucky Wesleyan College, Owensboro, Kentucky

In the generation before the Civil War, the Old Southwest (particularly the states of Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Missouri, Louisiana, Tennessee and Kentucky) was experiencing an important literary movement of a sort very different from the almost precisely coeval "flowering of New England." In newspapers, almanacs, magazines, and full-length books, authors such as A. B. Longstreet, Johnson J. Hooper, William T. Thompson, Joseph G. Baldwin, "Madison Tensas," Harden E. Taliaferro, Sol Smith, J. M. Field, David Crockett, John S. Robb, Joseph B. Cobb, George W. Harris, C. F. M. Noland, and a host of anonymous yarnspinners were writing stories which centered largely around what Henry Waterson called the "nether side" of Southern society. They were transcribing with only slight modification the rich storehouse of folk humor in their region to the printed page.

Although much of the humor contained in these earthy sketches has proved to be ephemeral, they are of enduring value in preserving for us a rare glimpse into the folk mind of that time and region. It is hardly necessary to add that the folk attitudes represented in the Southwestern yarns are very much the same as those of the backwoods (the term is not used disparagingly) of today. From the host of folk attitudes and interests which are revealed in the Southwestern yarns, only two will be considered here: folk superstitions and the frontiersman's view of culture.

The yarnspinners frequently capitalized on the superstitious nature of old women and Negroes as a source of humor. In one of "Madison Tensas" stories he developed at some length the character of a superstitious old woman of the Louisiana swamp country. Called by a Negro servant to the bedside of an ailing woman (who was actually merely inebriated), Tensas, the young "swamp doctor," found in attendance on the patient six old women, most notable of whom was Miss Ripson. Having heard the screech of an owl, this outspoken spinster was convinced that the stricken one would die. Remonstrances from the doctor provoked the following speech by Miss Ripson:

"How dus screech owls hollerin' make sick people die? Blessed Master! you a doctor, and ax sich a question! How is emnything fotch ('bout 'cept by sines an' awgrese, an' simbles, an' figurashuns, an' hiramgliptix, and sich like vareus wase that the Creator works out his desire to man's intimashum and expoundin'...."

When the drunken old woman recovered in spite of this dire prediction, Miss Ripson nullified the blow to her faith in screech owls by asserting, "He only screeched wunst! Ef he'd hollered the second time, I'd defide all the doctors in the created world to 'ad cured you; the thing would have bin impossible!"<sup>1</sup>

1. "Madison Tensas," "My First Call in the Swamp," Odd Leaves from the Life of a Louisiana Swamp Doctor (Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson, 1843), pp. 151-56.

No less superstitious was Mrs. Stallins, mother of Major Jones' light o' love in William T. Thompson's folk classic, Major Jones's Courtship. When an earthquake occurred in Pineville, Georgia, Mrs. Stallins, a firm believer in Millerism, thought the world was coming to an end ahead of the schedule established by the prophet of her creed, William Miller, and refused to allow the marriage of the major and her daughter. The unhappy Joseph Jones remarked at this juncture, "She ses it was jest so when old Mr. Noah built the ark--no body didn't believe him till the water was up to their chins, and then they couldn't help themselves." The superstitious old lady relented her decision to postpone the wedding, however, when she read in the Madison Miscellany (of which Major Jones' creator, Thompson, was himself editor) that Parson Miller had changed his date for the world's finish.<sup>2</sup>

The cult of Millerism, which had its vogue in the middle 1840's among superstitious natives of the West, numbered men as well as women among its converts. A temporary conversion occurred in the case of Tom Bangall, an engineer on a Mississippi steamer, in one of John S. Robb's humorous tales. In the beginning Tom was a reprobate and braggart. In his own estimation, "He was a rearing, tearing bar state scrouger--could chaw up any single specimen of the human race--any quantity of tobacco, and drink steam without flinching!"<sup>3</sup> Such an outspoken foe of all that was pious or sacred made the ideal victim of a prank hatched up by the members of his ship's company. As a result of a series of carefully planned maneuvers, Tom gradually came to believe that the world was coming to an end on a certain day, just as Father Miller had often said. On the day appointed for the end of the world and the second coming of Christ, the outwardly defiant Tom tried to screw his courage to the sticking point with the aid of a large quantity of strong drink. Finally he became so drunk that, in thrashing around blindly, he was scalded by a steam-pipe. In a trice, whatever skepticism he had left about the second advent was obliterated. Thinking he was in hell, Tom cried out, "Great God, it's all up now!" and fell over in a dead faint. It required considerable effort on the part of his fellow-boatmen to convince Tom that he was still in the land of the living.<sup>3</sup>

The superstitious nature of the Negro made him fair game for the frontier prankster. In one popular story of the 1840's, again capitalizing on the current interest in Millerism, the author told of a "false ascension" staged by Cabe Newham and his companions at a Millerite meeting in "Hoosierana." The hapless Negro Sam actually believed he was ascending to heaven when Cabe and his mates artfully pulled him high in the air by fastening a rope around him and drawing him up a tree.<sup>4</sup>

2. William T. Thompson, Major Jones's Courtship (Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and Brothers, 1848), pp. 104-110.

3. John S. Robb, "The Second Advent!" Streaks of Squatter Life (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1846), pp. 148-149. Cf. the similar motif in Chaucer's "Miller's Tale."

4. C. A. P. of Kentucky, pseud., "A Millerite Miracle," A Quarter Race in Kentucky, and Other Sketches, William T. Porter, ed. (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1846), pp. 60-63.



A local legend among the superstitious Negroes of Mississippi was used by Joseph B. Cobb as the mainspring of action in "The Legend of Black Creek." The chief prankster in this story, Bob Bagshot, singled out the old Negro, Uncle Ned, together with his white companion, Tony Randall, as the victims of his supreme effort. Uncle Ned was particularly adept at praying, Tony at loud hymn-singing. Both men subscribed wholeheartedly to the superstitious belief among natives of the region that a dead murderer who had committed an atrocious crime at Black Creek returned each year on the anniversary date of the murder to re-enact the deed. When, therefore, Tony and Uncle Ned happened to pass by Black Creek during a return journey from the city on the anniversary of the murder, it was almost inevitable that Bob Bagshot and several confederates should be waiting for them, carefully disguised as the murderer and his victim. When the mules of Tony and Ned stopped to drink in the creek, the pranksters re-enacted the crime before their terrified spectators. The wild flight of the victims of delusion naturally ensued. In the same story Cobb described another superstition of the Mississippi Negro. When confronted with phantoms, he changed directions and turned his coat wrong side outward. If he had no coat, he had to follow the ghost wherever the phantom led him.<sup>5</sup>

Sut Lovingood, rowdiest of all pranksters in the Smoky Mountains, was himself avowedly superstitious. In his own words, "I b'lieves intu witches, ghostez, an' all long-nebbed things, myself, an' so dus mos't folks, but they's tu cowardly tu say so."<sup>6</sup> In his boisterous yarns, however, it is almost always his victims who more obviously betray their superstitious natures. For example, Parson John Bullen, Sut's arch-enemy, believed that he was really being attacked by the serpents of hell when Sut placed several lizards in his pants during one of the parson's most vehement sermons.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, both Negroes and whites were superstitious enough to be scared out of their wits when Sut substituted a live Negro for a dead one in a coffin. This prank was climaxed by the rising from the dead of the old Negro Maje, hideously adorned with paint, horns, and pleated black snakes.<sup>8</sup> Such examples of the irrational attitude of the folk mind towards things supernatural appeared in many other Lovingood yarns.

One of the folk attitudes which pervade the stories of the Southwestern yarnspinners is the scornful view of culture--a somewhat vague term which will be here understood to include the arts (music, literature, dramatics) and book learning in general. Actually the true frontiersman tended to scorn only the most artificial and pretentious aspects of culture; he was by no means devoid of all appreciation of the arts. Carl Brooks Spotts has pointed out, for example, that on the Missouri frontier of 1830-1860, Shakespeare was the most popular dramatist and that dramatic tragedy was more popular than comedy.<sup>9</sup>

5. Joseph Beckham Cobb, "The Legend of Black Creek," Mississippi Scenes (Philadelphia: A Hart, late Carey and Hart, 1851), pp. 97-123.

6. George W. Harris, "Sut at a Negro Night Meeting," Sut Lovingood's Yarns (New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1867), p. 158.

7. Ibid., "Parson John Bullen's Lizards," pp. 48-59.

8. Ibid., "Frustrating a Funeral," pp. 210-226.

9. Carl Brooks Spotts, "The Development of Fiction on the Missouri Frontier, 1830-1860," Missouri Historical Review, XXIX (July, 1934), 285.

Apparently there was less regard for sophisticated music than for drama in the old Southwest. During the successful run of the musical play Cinderella in Mobile during the 1837-38 season, a friend of Sol Smith, the itinerant actor-manager, suggested to him that he "cut out the music." Virtually the same thing happened during the St. Louis production of Cinderella.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the Georgia rustic, Major Jones, remarked, after seeing a performance of the opera, The Daughter of the Regiment, at the Olympic Theatre in New York City, "I'd like 'em better if ther wasn't so much singin' in 'em."<sup>11</sup> And, after witnessing another operatic performance in Philadelphia, Jones commented dourly:

If operys didn't cum from Paris, whar all the fashionable bonnets and everything else comes from, and it wusn't considered unfashionable not to admire 'em, I don't b'lieve ther's many people in this country what would be willing to pay a half a dollar a night to hear sich a everlastin caterwaulin as they do make.<sup>12</sup>

The kinship of Major Jones' attitude with that of Mark Twain in the latter author's ridiculing of European culture in The Innocents Abroad some twenty-five years later is obvious. Before Thompson began his Major Jones stories, however, he had been preceded in his attack on European music by his fellow-Georgian, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, who devoted one sketch in his famous Georgia Scenes (1835) largely to a burlesque of a musical performance in Georgia society. His use of grossly distorted Italian names--Piggisqueaki, Crokifroggie<sup>13</sup>--helped convey Longstreet's disdain for European music, or more precisely perhaps, for Southern ladies who cultivated a foreign art rather than singing the simple airs of the Southland.<sup>13</sup>

If the frontiersman frequently failed to appreciate imported music, he apparently had no such bias against imported drama, or plays featuring foreign backgrounds. Among the most popular plays in Sol Smith's repertoire were Pizarro and William Tell, both of which appealed to the taste for broad effects characteristic of theatregoers from St. Louis to New Orleans in the 1830's and 1840's. It was almost inevitable that The Great Small Affairs Company in Joseph M. Field's "The Drama in Pokerville" should open with a performance of the ever popular Pizarro, advertising its most spectacular scenes in its posters and handbills.<sup>14</sup>

Apparently the rustic spectators of the drama were quite tolerant of, or oblivious to, the frequent mishaps that occurred during theatrical performances. Both Sol Smith and Field were fond of recording such misadventures.

10. Solomon F. Smith, Theatrical Management in the West and South for Thirty Years (New York: Harper and Brothers), pp. 124, 121.

11. William T. Thompson, Major Jones's Sketches of Travel from Georgia to Canada (Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and Brothers, 1848), p. 119.

12. Ibid., p. 97.

13. Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, "The Song," Georgia Scenes (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1840), pp. 82-93.

14. Joseph M. Field, "The Drama in Pokerville," The Drama in Pokerville; The Bench and Bar of Jurytown; and Other Stories (Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson and Brothers, 1847), pp. 9-12.



The latter author, in describing the opening night performance of Pizarro in Pokerville, ironically remarked about a contretemps occurring in the second act, "The fire came down from heaven, only sticking a little time, while the kink in the wire was shaken out...."<sup>15</sup> Smith told of the bungling supernumeraries who were hired to impersonate Austrian soldiers at a performance of William Tell in Mobile. The chief function of these supporting players was to seize the Swiss hero firmly at the end of the second act. So zealously did the husky men selected for the job carry out their assignment that their victim was almost crushed to death.<sup>16</sup> Audiences appear to have accepted such matters as these, sometimes with equanimity, often with delight.

Towards the pretenders of the theatre, however, the folk mind was ill-disposed. Thus, when the "fakers" who headed the Great Small Affairs Company invaded Pokerville to uplift that benighted river town, it could have been predicted that their stay would be short and ill-fated. Mrs. Dust, an aging Thespian who did not abandon her grand manner off stage, pretended to have a daughter at an Eastern seminary and a son who was a naval officer. Actually the former was being kept out of the way on a Kentucky farm; the latter was mate on a steamboat running to Texas.<sup>17</sup> Mr. Dust was not so despicable as his wife, being something of a regular fellow who liked to drink and gamble, but he was equally fraudulent in his extravagant advertisements of his crude theatrical troupe. The disintegration of the great plans of the Dusts could be traced largely to the work of Jake Bagley, the village prankster, who heartily disliked their pretentiousness. At a banquet in honor of the Small Affairs Company sponsored by Mrs. Slope, would-be cultural leader of Pokerville, young Jake persuaded the cook to substitute 'possum for pig, breaking up the party himself by casually divulging the news.<sup>18</sup> The subsequent misfortunes of the Dusts indicated that the natives of Pokerville had no more regard for their ilk than the river folk had for the fraudulent "king" and "duke" in Huckleberry Finn. Field's earlier piece may, as a matter of fact, be regarded as one of the more certain influences on Mark Twain in his classic of folk life on the Mississippi.

The backwoodsman's skeptical attitude towards book learning was frequently illustrated in the Southwestern yarns. In Surrey County, perhaps the most backward region in North Carolina, old Uncle Frost Snow openly expressed his pride in his humble status and language. A sturdy farmer who made his living by hard work, Uncle Frost declared, "Larnin' and big quality words is ruinin' on us fast. Even the Niggers is a-ketchin big quality words."<sup>19</sup> His son Dick shared his distaste for "quality talk." Davy Crockett at one time defended his bad grammar, stating rather boastfully that at the age of fifteen he did not know "the first letter in the book."<sup>20</sup> In harking back to his

15. Ibid., p. 22.

16. Smith, "William Tell Crushed," op. cit., p. 117.

17. Field, "The Drama in Pokerville," op. cit., p. 59.

18. Ibid., p. 50.

19. Harden E. Taliaferro, "Uncle Frost Snow," Fisher's River Scenes and Characters (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1859), p. 96.

20. Hamlin Garland (ed.), "A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee," The Autobiography of David Crockett (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), p. 36.

brief career as a magistrate in the backwoods of Tennessee, Crockett asserted that he "gave my decisions on the principles of common justice and honesty between man and man, and relied on natural born sense, and not on law learning to guide me; for I had never read a page in a law book in all my life."<sup>21</sup>

The three best-developed characters in the Southwestern yarns--Sut Lovin-good, Simon Sugs, and Major Jones--all glorified horse sense as against book learning. Sut at times suggested that he was illiterate, but on other occasions ridiculed Longfellow's "Hiawatha" and "Excelsior," indicating some slight acquaintance with books. Simon Suggs was shrewd enough to outwit his associates consistently, yet his pseudo-biographer, Hooper, said of him at one point, "His autograph....was only produced unblotted and in orthographical correctness after three several efforts....on the counter of Bill Griffin's confectionery."<sup>22</sup> Major Jones was somewhat apologetic about his deficiencies in grammar and spelling but he too voiced the prevalent attitude among the untutored rustics and backwoodsmen in remarking, upon the occasion of his sweetheart's graduation from the Female Academy in Macon, "Drat the larnin, say I--genus comes by natur, but everybody kin larn how to spell, you know."<sup>23</sup>

In summary, the printed tales written by the Southwestern yarnspinners between 1830 and 1860 are valuable source books in the study of folk attitudes in their region. These early humorists capitalized on the superstitious nature of the mountaineer, the backwoodsman, the riverman, old women, and Negroes, showing their fervent belief in ghosts, Millerism, and other supernatural phenomena. They also represented the frontiersman as having something of a taste for exciting theatrical plays but a strong dislike of European music, together with a deep-rooted scorn for pretenders to culture and for polite literature. The natives portrayed in the Southwestern yarns were in general agreement that horse sense was far more important than book learning. Though not to be taken as gospel in their depiction of such attitudes, the humorous yarns of the Old Southwest are perhaps the most intimate revelations extant of the folk mind of the Old South.

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21. Ibid., p. 90.

22. Johnson J. Hooper, Simon Suggs' Adventures (Americus, Georgia: Americus Book Company, 1928), p. 11.

23. Thompson, Major Jones's Courtship, p. 56.

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#### IN MEMORIAM

In the death of George J. ten Hoor in Nashville after a short illness, on April 23, 1952, the Tennessee Folklore Society lost a distinguished member.

Coming to Nashville from the University of Florida, he was finishing his fifth year as Head of the Vanderbilt University Department of German. Since his coming he has been "loyal to our Society, never missing a meeting, and endearing himself to all who knew him.

His special enthusiasm was folksong. But his tastes were broad. Recognizing Dr. ten Hoor's scholarly attainments, the Southeastern Folklore Society made him its secretary-treasurer, a position which he held at the time of his death. His folkloristic enthusiasms are shared by his wife Martha and his daughter Marie who survive him. The members of the Tennessee Folklore Society will miss George ten Hoor.

--George Pullen Jackson

# NEWS AND REVIEWS

FOLKLORE BIBLIOGRAPHY AVAILABLE. American Folklore: A Bibliography, compiled by Marguerite Cooley and Vernon Parks, is a mimeographed listing of books on American folk arts, folk music, and folklore that are available at the Joint University Libraries in Nashville. In its forty-three pages, some 550 entries are classified so as to show readily where materials relating to various states and regions may be found. The pamphlet is published by The English Department of George Peabody College for Teachers, and may be obtained by writing to Dr. John E. Brewton. The charge, to cover paper costs and mailing, is 30 cents.

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A REPORT ON "SINGIN' BILLY." "Singin' Billy," an opera, with drama and lyrics by Donald Davidson and musical score by Charles Bryan, received its premiere performance in Nashville, April 23-28, by a student cast and full orchestra from Peabody College and Vanderbilt University. Bryan conducted.

The story was an imagined incident in the life of the real William Walker, teacher of rural singing schools in the 1830's and author of The Southern Harmony, a veritable storehouse of religious folksongs or "white spirituals." Singin' Billy, his book, and a short singing school worked a small miracle in the unpretentious cultural life of an upland South Carolina settlement. The Southern Harmony became (in Davidson's symbolism just as it was in historical reality) a factor in harmonizing the highlanders one with another, one religious group with the others and, specifically, the old tradition of worldly-ballad (love song) singing with that of their transmutation into "spiritual songs." This soothing and altogether wholesome influence was part and parcel of the play's overall purpose in exemplifying the universal struggle between man as a social-moral being and man as animal.

I am not to discuss here the value of the opera as drama or as music. It must be said briefly, however, that the audiences which filled every seat at every performance were highly delighted and would, I am sure, agree that poet and composer reached new highs in "Singin' Billy."

More significant, even, than its excellence as a stage play was its folklore. Its authors did not call it a "folk" opera. And I am glad. But music, dialogue, and action were American folk to the marrow. The play was integrated folklore. It had that satisfying oneness which is inevitably lost when one picks folkways apart and classifies them--as we all do.

This making whole of that which has perhaps too often been dismembered, was one of the two achievements of Bryan and Davidson in their operatic work. The other was the fact that they were the first to tap this "spiritual song" wellspring of our national lore and to transform it into musical drama.

--George Pullen Jackson

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TENNESSEANS AT THE NATIONAL FOLK FESTIVAL. Tennessee was represented at the Globe-Democrat-sponsored National Folk Festival in St. Louis, May 14-17, by Professor George C. Grise of Clarksville and Mrs. Bertha Hancock and Miss Fanny Kiser of Old Hickory. Professor Grise appeared on two afternoon programs,



singing folk songs with which he has entertained members of the T.F.S. at their annual meetings. Mrs. Hancock and Miss Kiser performed on various folk instruments and discussed Tennessee songs and instruments at a special interest group meeting on May 15.

Professor Grise reports that about a thousand performers from twenty-one states and the Dominion of Canada came together at the festival. He estimates that 20,000 people attended the eight sessions. Folk dancing was predominant in the programs. More folk singing is planned for the Festival in 1953.

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FOLKSINGER ON TV AND RADIO. Mrs. Grace Creswell, whom T.F.S. members attending the November meeting will remember with pleasure and admiration, was one of the Tennesseans chosen for top honors by Ted Mack on the Original Amateur Hour when he visited Nashville in April. As a result, Mrs. Creswell was invited to go to New York to appear twice (April 18 and 20) on NBC-TV. She also gave a folksong concert at Silliman College, Yale University. Among other folksongs, she sang "Lolly tu dum," "My True Love Has Gone Away," and "Cockle Shells." Mrs. Creswell plays her own accompaniment on the autoharp.

On June 3, Mrs. Creswell will open a regular Sunday noon (12:45) series of folk music programs to be broadcast from Station WSM, Nashville. To supplement her own singing and playing, she expects to introduce guest performers from time to time.

Members of T.F.S. are invited to write Station WSM in support of the new program if they feel it is worthy of such support and ought to be continued.

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ENGLISH TEACHERS CONSIDER FOLKLORE IN EDUCATION. On April 24 the Nashville Council of Teachers of English, meeting at George Peabody College for Teachers, was invited by Dr. John E. Brewton to consider "The Uses of Folklore in American Education." Following Dr. Brewton's discussion, the teachers enjoyed folksongs sung by Winifred Smith and Jack Rickard, who played their own accompaniments on the autoharp and guitar. All who attended the meeting were presented with copies of American Folklore, a bibliography compiled by members of Dr. Brewton's class in Folklore at Peabody.

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MUSIC EDUCATORS DISCUSS FOLK MUSIC PROJECT. In connection with the spring meeting of the Tennessee Education Association, the Folk Music Project Committee of the Tennessee Music Educators Association held a meeting in Nashville on April 3. Dr. George Boswell presided as Chairman; Dr. George Pullen Jackson was an honored guest.

The report of the Folk Music Project Committee was read by Dr. Boswell at a dinner meeting of the Music Educators Association. The report reviewed cooperation with other groups in the state, notably the Tennessee Folklore Society; the publication of articles on Tennessee folk music, particularly those in the T.F.S. Bulletin; plans for the Tennessee Folksong Archives to be housed in the new State Library, and recommendations for cooperative work on Tennessee folk music in the future.

Dr. Boswell noted that "Principal objectives of the Folk Music Project have been two in number: (1) collection and preservation of as much as possible of the genuine oral traditional music of Tennessee, and (2) making it and other folk music available to the educational leaders of our state for use in instruction and entertainment."

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CITIZENS' FORUM DISCUSSES FOLK MUSIC. Nashville's "Let's Think" public forum on February 14 turned a considerable part of its attention to the subject of folk music. As reported by the Nashville Tennessean the following morning, a protest against what he termed "pseudo-folk" music was voiced by Charles F. Bryan. The popular singer, Eddie Arnold, attributed the adulteration of folk music in part to the pressure of New York publishers who insist on thinking of all such music in terms of a stereotype of the cowboy song. Dr. George Pullen Jackson deplored commercialization of music--the "judging the quality of music by the amount of money it makes."

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KENTUCKY FOLKLORE SOCIETY MEETING. The Kentucky Folklore Society held its forty-first annual spring meeting in the Henry Clay Hotel, Louisville, on April 18. The address, "The Discourse of Fools--Weather Proverbs and Weather Lore," was given by Professor W. Edson Richmond of Indiana University. Officers elected for 1952-53 are: President, Gordon Wilson, Western State College, First Vice-president, Mrs. G. B. Heer, Anchorage; Second Vice-president, Mrs. John R. Thomas, Lebanon; Corresponding Secretary, D. K. Wilgus, Western State College; Recording Secretary, Mrs. J. L. Duncan, Louisville; Treasurer, Tom C. Venable, Murray State College. Herbert Halpert of Murray State College was appointed chairman of the committee to make plans for the fall meeting at Murray.

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DR. JACKSON STUDIES PROLIFERATION OF A FOLKSONG MOTIF. The December, 1951, issue of the Southern Folklore Quarterly carries an interesting and useful article by Dr. George Pullen Jackson entitled "The 400-Year Odyssey of the 'Captain Kidd' Song Family--Notably Its Religious Branch." The study shows how into a single "melodic mold" (often altered and adapted, but always recognizable) has been poured an amazing range and variety of lyric metal.

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AMERICAN INDIAN MUSIC ON LIBRARY OF CONGRESS DISCS. The Library of Congress announces the release of three new long-playing records of American Indian music. The discs record songs of the Sioux; the Yuma, Cocopa, and Yaqui; and of the Pawnee and the northern Ute. The recordings were originally made on cylinders more than twenty-five years ago. Dr. Frances Densmore, who made the original recordings, has edited the transcription on vinylite discs. The records, together with explanatory pamphlets, can be secured from the Recording Laboratory, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C., for \$4.50 each plus tax and shipping cost.

A catalogue listing all the Library's recordings of Indian, American, and South American folk songs can be obtained from the Recording Laboratory for ten cents a copy.



Gilbert E. Govan and James W. Livingood, The Chattanooga Country 1540-1951: From Tomahawks to T.V.A., New York: E. P. Dutton, 1952. \$5.00.

The regional story of The Chattanooga Country 1540-1951 is more than a history. It is the folk legend of Indian, river, mountain, war, defeat and progress, failure and success, dreaming and reality all woven into a pattern with geographical setting and sociological interpretation as effective as it is interesting and authentic. Here the mores of the people are seen to have grown out of the physical facts of the area as well as the historical experience of the inhabitants. Such mores give direction, if not always objectiveness, to people of the "Chattanooga Country."

They are shown to be generally conservative, as a result of the fact that theirs is a hill country, and because much of their political and economic life has been one of cooperative compromise.

A proportionate emphasis is given to leaders who have loomed large in the state and the nation: Sequoyah, the remarkable leader of the Cherokees; Col. Evan Shelby and Col. John Sevier of frontier days; Generals Grant, Thomas, Bragg, Rosencrans, etc., of the battles about Chattanooga; Adolph S. Ochs of The Chattanooga Times and New York Times; and leaders of T.V.A. and Oak Ridge such as the Morgans and Lilienthal. The importance of flood and transportation development of the Tennessee River is interestingly related to the city's place of leadership in industrial development. If the word Chattanooga once meant "Mountains looking at each other," at least the mountains also have the satisfaction of knowing today that the outside world knows just about how tall they stand.

--E. G. Rogers  
Tennessee Wesleyan College

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